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Whitman

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and political leaders, how different the give and take of democratic process might seem, how much sharper our sense of the bond between individual fulfillment and community values.

To Everything There Is a Season

Technological progress in Whitman's era had completed what he called the "rondure" of the world. Through the laying of telegraph cables across oceans, the opening of the Suez Canal, and the joining of America's railroads, the physical earth had become truly one for the first time in human history. To complete these achievements on the human plane, Whitman offered the image of marriage between races as the fulfillment of God's universality:

Passage to India!

Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first,
The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
The lands to be welded together.

("Passage to India")

We no longer share Whitman's faith that technology (and intermarriage) carry out God's purpose. While he lived to see technology unite the world in hope, we have lived to see it unite the world in fear. Our fearsome century has taught us that matter and energy are indeed one. How much more of a perceptual leap must we take to know what Whitman and early hasidic masters knew: that matter and spirit can be one; that through our own spiritual energies, we

can transform matter's potential and make the world we live in holy, no longer held captive to matter's destructive energy—a world freed, by human self-limitation, to renew the promise of creation.

A holy, loving, creative relationship between matter and spirit is expressed everywhere in *Leaves of Grass*. We need to hear it today in ways that Whitman in his century did not even begin to imagine. ■

NOTES

1. "Reflections on the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time" *Ariel*, 1970. Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) was the pioneer in the scholarly study of Jewish mysticism. He served as professor of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem from 1933 to 1965.

2. Scholem, pp. 51-52. Rabbi Kook (1865-1935) served as chief rabbi of Palestine under the British Mandate. Unlike Kook, most Orthodox spokesmen condemned the work of the secular Zionists. Kook refused to see a sharp line dividing the sacred and the profane.

Future Conference

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Creating an Institute for the Future is likewise a profoundly hopeful act, based on a sense that we can indeed shape our destiny. Despite the obstacles we face in making our dreams come true, human beings retain free will—the power to choose a future that differs from the past. U.S. social observer Philip Slater once expressed it with irony: "Every morning all 200 million of us get out of bed and put a lot of energy into creating and recreating the

social calamities that oppress, infuriate, and exhaust us."²

Perhaps we can do better.

The conference ended as a celebration that arose from the excitement of bringing together so many diverse kinds of people. "It is like gathering together embers—what emerges is a flame," said RRC student Leila Berner, in telling how she has helped create an inclusive community in a Baltimore congregation.

Dr. Berner could just as well have been describing the conference itself. Earlier, on the first

day, Michael Paley had asserted, "Bringing people together is the future." We teach each other, he said, and the future is brighter for the sharing among many perspectives. This is how the Institute for the Jewish Future began its life—an auspicious start. ■

NOTES

1. Edward Cornish, *The Study of the Future: An Introduction to the Art and Science of Understanding and Shaping Tomorrow's World* (Washington, D.C.: World Future Society, 1977), p. 73.

2. Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), p. 2.

